



THE BATTLE OF HARLAW

ITS TRUE PLACE IN HISTORY

BY

WILLIAM MACKAY, LL.D.

INVERNESS

PRINTED AT THE "NORTHERN CHRONICLE" OFFICE

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The Battle of Harlaw was fought on 24th July, 1411, the opposing leaders being Donald, Lord of the Isles, and Alexander, Earl of Mar. On the suggestion of Professor W. L. Davidson, of Aberdeen University, a descendant of Robert Davidson, the brave Provost of that city who fell in the fight, the quincentary of the battle was celebrated in Aberdeen on Coronation Day, 1911. On the initiative also of the Professor the Town Council resolved to erect a monument to the memory of Provost Davidson and the other burgesses of Aberdeen who fell in the battle. The memorial—a high massive tower, standing conspicuously on the battlefield—was formally inaugurated, in presence of a large concourse of people, on the 24th day of July, 1914. The Lord Provost of Aberdeen, Mr Adam Maitland, whose forefathers have been tenants of lands in the immediate neighbourhood from at least the time of the battle, presided, and made a short introductory statement; an impressive dedication prayer was

* Read before the Gaelic Society of Inverness on 8th December, 1921.

offered by the Rev. Sir George Adam Smith, Principal of Aberdeen University; Professor Davidson delivered an eloquent and valuable address; and on the invitation of Lord Provost Maitland and his Town Council I spoke from the Highland point of view. The proceedings and speeches were fully reported in the newspapers, and the "Aberdeen Daily Journal's" account was subsequently published separately, with illustrations.

In my address, after thanking the Lord Provost and Town Council for the invitation to speak, which I accepted as a compliment to the Highlands, I referred to the heroism of Provost Davidson and his fellow burgesses in leaving their shops and booths, and the city walls behind which they were wont to watch and ward, and in marching into the wilds of the Garioch to meet the Lord of the Isles, and to prevent an attack which they believed, or at any rate suspected, he intended to make upon Aberdeen; and, after giving expression to my feelings of pride that I was given an opportunity of adding a stone to their cairn, I spoke as follows;—

"Now, my Lord Provost, on this occasion, when we are gathered together to commemorate the brave deeds of the men of old, it would be out of place for me to raise one speck of controversial dust. Perhaps, however, you will allow me to allude in the few minutes at my disposal to one or two points in connection with the Harlaw campaign on which history has been in the past strangely misread. . . .

"For generations historians believed that the war was a struggle for mastery between

the Highlands and the Lowlands. It is now realised that that view is without historical foundation, and that the quarrel, although national in its importance and possible results, was in itself a purely family feud between Donald of the Isles and his uncle, the Duke of Albany, Regent of Scotland, and his house. The bone of contention was the Earldom of Ross. To that Earldom, Donald, or rather his wife, had a just right, but Albany contrived to have it conferred on his own son, the Earl of Buchan. That injustice was aggravated by a circumstance which historians have overlooked—the loss, or threatened loss, of certain lands in Buchan which of old belonged to the Earls of Ross. To these encroachments on the rights of his wife and himself, Donald resolved to put an end, and hence the battle of Harlaw. He was opposed by the Earl of Mar, who is represented in certain histories as a Saxon or Teuton leading an army of Lowlanders, while Donald is represented as the Celtic leader of the whole Highlands. But those chiefs were first cousins, and there was at least as much Celtic blood in Mar as there was in Donald. Mar, an illegitimate son of the Wolf of Badencch by a Highland girl bearing the Gaelic name of Mairead, or Mariota as Latinised by the scribes of the day, was born and bred in the Highlands, spoke Gaelic, and, if tradition speaks truth, was no mean Gaelic bard. One of his verses, composed during his wanderings after his defeat at Inverlochy, has become a proverb:—

‘ Is math an cocair an t-acras,
 ‘S maing a ni tarcuis air biadh—
 Fuarag eorn’ a sail mo bhroige,
 Biadh a b’fhearr a fhuair mi riamh.’

(Hunger is a cook right good,
 Woe to him who sneers at food—
 Barley crowdie in my shoe,
 The sweetest food I ever knew).

“ His army consisted of mail-clad gentlemen of Aberdeenshire and neighbouring counties, and—what is frequently lost sight of—to a greater extent of the Gaelic speaking Highlanders of his own province of Mar, and of the Earldom of Buchan. We must not forget that, although English or Scots was the language of commerce in Aberdeen and other burghs, Gaelic was in 1411, and for long thereafter, spoken all over Aberdeenshire, which has the honour of having given to us the oldest specimens of written Scottish Gaelic known to exist, and that on both sides the battle shouts and cries which pierced the air on 24th July, 1411, were mainly in Gaelic and not in the Saxon tongue. Donald was opposed by a chief who was at least as Celtic as himself, and who was followed by the Celts of Buchan and Mar, and—what is also usually forgotten—supported by certain clans north of the Spey. For example, my own clan, the Mackays, fought the Lord of the Isles at Dingwall on his way to Harlaw, and my mother’s clan, the Frasers, endeavoured to stop his progress at Beaully. It is clear that the question of the predominance of the Celt

or of the Saxon was not at issue on the day of the Red Harlaw.

“It is also a mistake to suppose that the struggle was one between civilisation, represented by Mar, and barbarism, represented by the Lord of the Isles. One can imagine how amused Mar himself would have been if told that some day he would be looked upon as the champion of civilisation in Scotland. Unfortunate in his birth and in his early environments, he became a leader of caterans, and the terror of Highlands and Lowlands. The story of how he won the Countess of Mar and her territory and title is well known. In the same violent manner he seized territories further north, including my own native parish. He was a man of immense energy and of masterful will, and in his later years he served his country so well that his death, which happened at Inverness, where his dust lies and where we are proud to think we still have his effigy, was greatly regretted; but he had not the social standing, or the culture, or, I venture to say, the civilising influence of his cousin of the Isles.

“To-day, however, it must suffice us to remember that those cousins were men of supreme valour, and that on the ground on which we are now standing they fought, and inspired their followers to fight, with a fierceness and a stubbornness which made the deepest impression on Lowlands and Highlands. In the bloody conflict the Provost and burgesses of Aberdeen fell gloriously in defence of their city, and you have done a good and patriotic

thing in raising this cairn to their lasting memory. They were not alone in their death. The carnage on both sides was so great that each side could say with truth:—

‘Gin onybody speer at ye
For them we took awa,
Ye may tell them plain, and very plain,
They’re sleepin’ at Harlaw.’ ”

Sir George Adam Smith, in his dedication prayer, used the words:—“To-day and upon this field we praise Thee in particular for those of our fathers who with a lively conscience of Thy blessings of law and civil order did here most freely yield their lives in defence of the same. With grateful hearts we dedicate this monument to their piety and valour, and where they fell for home and city we would before Thee exercise ourselves in our responsibilities for the civilisation they so bravely defended from the forces of disorder, and presented to the generations after them.”

My friend, Professor Davidson, did not accept the view that the battle was the outcome of fierce racial hatred between Highlander and Lowlander, and he expressed the opinion that it was in part “the working of the predatory and freebooting instinct inherent in us all, but specially conspicuous in the Highlandman,” and added, “it was also in large measure the dominating spirit and personal ambition of Donald, Lord of the Isles, which prompted him to cross over to the mainland from his island home and march onwards through Ross and Inverness and Moray, devastating and terror-

ising as he went, towards Dundee (his objective), laying hold of Aberdeen by the way. It is significant that in his advance he showed a delightful impartiality as regards opponents: he was equally ready to fight with resistent Highlanders—first the Mackays and next the Frasers—as with unoffending Lowlanders. On the other hand, there is no evidence that Aberdonians hated Donald and his associates in themselves: they only hated their intention to pillage and destroy their town. About one hundred years later than Harlaw Hector Boece, the first Principal of the University of Aberdeen, was magnanimous enough to write with sympathy of the claim that led Donald to take up arms against the Regent, though he could not approve his plan of raiding Aberdeen. And what held then surely holds now. There is no animosity against the Highlanders on our part. Our hearts are large, and we welcome our Highland friends who have honoured us with their presence to-day."

After the dedication cake and wine were partaken of. Mr Duff of Hatton, the Convener of Aberdeenshire, proposed the Memory of Provost Davidson and the Heroes of Harlaw. In doing so he said:—"I feel that the toast which I have the honour to propose on this occasion is by no means an easy one, and for two reasons. In the first place, I think every aspect of the subject has been exhaustively and completely dealt with by the previous speakers whom you have heard outside; and in the second place, the few things they have left me to say have proved to be entirely wrong—for I

was brought up in the old fashioned and erroneous notion that at the battle of Harlaw there was a fight for a principle between two civilisations, if Dr Mackay will forgive me for saying so. This having been proved to be wrong, I feel to a certain extent that what I had intended to say would not be correct."

The views which I expressed came, if I may say so, as a surprise upon the huge audience, and were made the subject of leading articles in several newspapers. An eminent non-resident member of this Society suggested that I should amplify my statement in a paper to be read before the Society. I promised to do so, but the Great War and its troubles and anxieties intervened, and I have only now been able to take up the subject.

The point which I endeavoured to bring out in my Aberdeen speech was that there was no historical foundation for the view that the war was a struggle for mastery between the Highlands and the Lowlands, between the Celts and the Saxons, or between barbarism and civilisation, but that it was a purely family feud between Donald of the Isles and his uncle the Duke of Albany, Regent of Scotland, and his house. For the errors which have spread on this and other points Sir Walter Scott and Mr Fraser-Tytler, the Historian of Scotland, are greatly responsible. In "Tales of a Grandfather," first published in 1828, Scott describes the battle as a contest between the Highlanders and the Lowlanders—the army of Donald of the Isles consisting, according to him, of 10,000 men, "all Highlanders like himself," and that

of the Earl of Mar being an "inferior army, but composed of Lowland gentlemen better armed and disciplined than the followers of Donald." Scott describes the fight as a most desperate battle, in which both parties suffered great loss, "but though the Lowlanders suffered severely the Highlanders had the worst, and were obliged to retreat after the battle. This was fortunate for Scotland, since otherwise the Highlanders, at that time a wild and barbarous people, would have overrun and perhaps actually conquered a great part of the civilised country."

Fraser-Tytler, in his *History of Scotland*, also first published in 1828, speaks of the Lord of the Isles' campaign as a rebellion, and refers to his "boast" that he would burn the Royal Burgh of Aberdeen and make a desert of the country to the shores of the Tay, and to his men as animated by the thought of plunder, and by the deep rooted hostility between the Celtic and Saxon races.

Hill Burton, in his *History of Scotland*, published between 1867 and 1870, describes the battle as a final struggle for supremacy between the Highlands and the Lowlands, and states that Donald's purpose was to pillage and burn and conquer Scotland to the Tay. He adds: "He took the country by surprise, and there was a hasty gathering of the gentry with their tenants and the burgher forces of the towns. They could muster a small body only, but it was a high spirited, efficient force, well armed. It was commanded by the Earl of Mar, whom we have lately found in different company"

Again, Burton in "The Scot Abroad" writes: "That critical day [Harlaw] brought to an end what our common historians call the rebellion of Donald of the Isles. The question that it really decided was whether the representatives of the Norse race who had founded an empire in the Islands and Western Highlands should continue to be an independent monarchy, ruling Scotland as far as the Forth, and perhaps as far as the English border."

In his History of Scotland Andrew Lang describes Donald's army as a Highland avalanche, and states that neither Montrose, Claverhouse, nor Prince Charles ever led so huge a Highland host. The opposing forces he describes as the little army of Mar, partly consisting of mail-clad knights, and pictures them in the fight as being "surrounded by the Highlanders as by a sea."

Hume Brown, in his Short History of Scotland, first published in 1908, refers to the battle as one of the best known battles in the history of Scotland. "It was not," he writes, "fought between Scots and English, but between Highlanders and Lowlanders, and Sir Walter Scott thought that it decided which of the two were to have the chief power in Scotland. The battle came about in this way. The Lord of the Isles, that is, of the Western Islands or Hebrides, whose name was Donald, was very anxious to get the Earldom of Ross, which he said belonged to his wife. Now the Duke of Albany would not allow this for two reasons. First, if Donald got the Earldom it would have made him too powerful; and,

secondly, Albany thought that his own son John, Earl of Buchan, had a better right to the Earldom than the Lord of the Isles. Albany therefore gave the Earldom to his son. But the Lord of the Isles was determined that he would have it, and so he collected an army of islanders, and then came to the mainland, where he was joined by many Highland chiefs at the head of their clans. Having now got this great army, Donald led it against the town of Aberdeen, promising that, if the town were taken, his followers would get a great deal of plunder. Luckily there was a man in Aberdeen-hire who knew far more about fighting than Donald, and was a more skilful leader. And who was this leader? He was the son of the terrible Wolf of Badenoch, of whom we have just read, and was now the Earl of Mar, which is a district in Aberdeenshire. This Earl of Mar got an army together, partly of gentlemen with their followers, and partly of townsmen from Aberdeen. . . . The two armies met at a place called Harlaw, not very far from Aberdeen, and then began one of the bloodiest battles ever fought on Scottish ground. The Highlanders had ten times as many men as the Lowlanders, but many of Mar's men were clad in armour, while the Highlanders were not."

And, finally, Professor R. S. Rait, in his *History of Scotland*, published in 1915, refers to the campaign as the greatest Highland revolt, and adds that the spoil of the city of Aberdeen tempted Donald to the east country, and that it was "believed that he had entertained a wild hope of adding to his own possession all Scotland as far south as the Tay."

These statements from the pages of our nineteenth and twentieth century historians would, if true, show, first, that the Lord of the Isles' campaign was a rebellion against the King, and that his object was to place upon his own head the crown of Scotland south to the Tay, if not to the Forth or even the English border; second, that the campaign was a struggle for mastery between the Highlands and the Lowlands, or the Celts and the Saxons; third, that the struggle was one between civilisation, represented by Mar, and barbarism, represented by the Lord of the Isles; and, fourth, that Donald's army was greatly superior in numbers to that of Mar. My belief is that on all these points these historians are wrong, and I shall now give my reasons for that belief. To begin with, I shall, I think, be able to show that the erroneous views are mainly of modern growth.

The first historian who gives an account of the battle is the author of the *Book of Pluscardin*—an unknown Scotsman who was personally acquainted with the Maid of Orleans, and was present at her death in 1431. He writes (translation from the Latin): "In the year 1411 was the fight of Harlaw in Garioch—Donald of the Isles against Alexander Earl of Mar and the Sheriff of Angus, where many nobles fell in battle." There is here no reference to a rebellion, or to a contest between Celt and Saxon, or to a conflict between civilisation and barbarism, or to a superiority in numbers of Donald's forces to that of Mar.

John Major (or Mair), who in 1521 published his history, writes (translation from the Latin): "In that year [1411] was fought that battle far famed amongst the Scots, of Harlaw. Donald of the Isles, with a valiant following of wild Scots, 10,000 strong, aimed at the spoiling of Aberdeen, a town of mark, and other places, and against him Alexander Stewart, Earl of Mar, and Alexander Ogilvie, Sheriff of Angus, gathered their men, and at Harlaw met Donald of the Isles. Hot and furious was the fight, nor was a battle with a foreign foe in so large a force ever waged or was more full of jeopardy than this, so that at our games, when we were at the Grammar School [of Haddington], we were wont to form ourselves into opposite sides, and say that we wanted to play at the Battle of Harlaw. Though it may be more generally said amongst the common people that the wild Scots were defeated, I find the very opposite of this in the chroniclers; only the Earl of the Isles was forced to retreat, and he counted amongst his men more of slain than did the civilised Scots. Yet these men did not put Donald to open rout, though they fiercely strove, and not without success, to put a check upon the audacious man. They slew his drill master [*campi doctor*]* and over 900 of his men, and yet more were sorely wounded. Of the southerners 600 only lost their lives, of whom some were gentlemen." Again, there is in Major's story no reference to a rebellion, or to Celt or Saxon, or to the superiority in numbers of Donald's forces over Mar's.

* Hector Maclean of Duart.

Leslie, Bishop of Ross, in his history, first published at Rome in 1578, states (Dalrymple's translation), after referring to the quarrel about the Earldom of Ross, that Donald came to the Garioch "raidie to spoyle Abirdine," and that Mar "with a walet [valiant] cumpanie of noble men with speid spurs to meet him; heir the bludie battel of the Harlaw was fochtime; great slauchter on baith handis; mony alsweil knychtis as utheris nobles war na mair sein. The victorie uncertene." Again, there is no reference to rebellion, or to Celt or Saxon, or to Donald's superiority in numbers. Leslie ascribes the conflict to Donald's desire to recover the Earldom of Ross which the Governor (Albany) had persuaded the young Countess (Euphemia) to renounce "partlie with fair wordis, partlie with foul, and to his wish to spred his boundis wyder." These "bounds," I find from other sources, were very extensive, and consisted, among others, of the thanage of Aberchirder in the Sheriffdom of Banff, the thanage of Kincardine in the Sheriffdom of Kincardine, and the lands of Fingask and the barony of Kinedward in the Sheriffdom of Aberdeen. These valuable domains had been possessed by the Earls of Ross for about a century before Donald's time, but they were now in danger of being lost through the machinations of Albany, who had succeeded in getting his son made Earl of Buchan. They were well worth fighting for, although they have never been referred to by our historians as an element in the quarrel. [See Antiquities of Aberdeen (Spalding Club), Volumes II., III., IV.].

The last old author to whom I shall refer is George Buchanan, who in 1582 published his history. "In 1411," he states (Aikman's translation), "Donald Lord of the Æbudæ [Hebrides] having as next heir, which indeed he was, demanded the restoration of Ross, taken from him by the Governor [Albany] under some legal pretext, and finding himself denied justice, collected 10,000 of his Islanders and made a descent upon the continent, where he easily took possession of Ross, everyone cheerfully returning to the vassalage of their rightful Lord. This ready submission of the inhabitants of Ross excited his mind, naturally ambitious, to attempt greater exploits. Having advanced into Moray [a Province which included Inverness-shire to the bounds of Glenelg and Lochaber] where there was no force to oppose him, he reduced it, then carried his depredations into Strathbogie, and threatened Aberdeen. The Governor prepared forces against this sudden and unexpected enemy: but, as the greatness and imminence of the danger would not allow of waiting for distant aid, Alexander, Earl of Mar, the Governor's nephew, with almost all the nobility beyond Tay, opposed Donald at the village of Harlaw, where a bloody and memorable battle was fought; the brave nobility contending for their estates and honour against the unbounded ferocity of their invaders. Night separated the combatants, rather fatigued with fighting than that either had obtained the advantage." Here again there is no mention of rebellion, Celt or Saxon, or the superiority of one side in

numbers. Buchanan's references to the suddenness and unexpectedness of the invasion and to the nobility's contention for their estates and honour were in all probability founded upon a tradition which had grown up during the 170 years which had passed since the battle, and are not to be relied upon as history, although they have been accepted as such by modern historians. If the Chief of the Mackays, in the extreme north of Sutherlandshire, came to know of the intended invasion in time to enable him to collect an army and to oppose the invaders at Dingwall, why should Albany and Mar and the men of power who supported them fail, through want of time, to raise a sufficient army in the wide, accessible, and thickly populated districts under their influence or control in the east of Scotland? The Mackay Chiefs were for generations on terms of intimacy and friendship with the Chiefs of the Clan Forbes in Aberdeenshire, both families claiming descent from a common ancestor, Conacher of Urquhart on Loch Ness; and it was probably in response to a message from the Forbes Chief that Mackay opposed the Lord of the Isles. It has also to be noted that Lord Lovat had sufficient notice of the invasion to enable him to oppose Donald at Beaulieu. Was that done at the instance of the Frasers of Aberdeenshire?

Let me now recapitulate and summarise the various points to which I have referred bearing upon the true place of Harlaw in history.

First. The contest was not one between Highlands and Lowlands, or between Celt and

Saxon. Donald's followers were of course Celts, mixed no doubt with the blood of the ancient Island Norse. Most of our historians speak of Mar's army as if it consisted only of a few hurriedly collected mail-clad gentlemen of the counties of Aberdeen, Kincardine, and Forfar. They forget or ignore the fact that the most of those gentlemen were proprietors of territories which were inhabited by Celts in blood, and in which the Gaelic tongue was at the time generally spoken, even down to and including Fife, and that the proprietors must, according to the law and custom of the time, have been followed by their Gaelic-speaking tenants and dependants. Even such of the natives as had lost their Gaelic did not thereby become Saxons, for the Ethiopian does not change his skin when he changes his language. Mar himself was, as I showed at Aberdeen, at least as Celtic as was his first cousin the Lord of the Isles. He was an illegitimate grandson of a Scottish King, and apart from the original Celtic strain in the Royal Stewarts, we know that his mother was a purely Celtic woman who in all probability knew no language but Gaelic, and who bore the Wolf of Badenoch—Alasdair mor mac an Rìgh—Big Alexander son of the King—seven bastard children, notwithstanding that his lawful wife, the Countess of Ross, still lived. Mar was one of those children, and grew up in the very disreputable household in Badenoch of the Wolf, who was excommunicated for burning Elgin Cathedral to the ground. Mar's mother is known in the proceedings taken in 1389 by the Bishops of

Moray and Ross against the Wolf for deserting his Countess, as *Mariota Filia Achyn*—Mairead, daughter of Eachann (Hector)—and not *Athyn* as the scribe who in or before 1837 copied the ancient Register of Moray for the printer misread the word. Failing to take any meaning out of *Athyn*, which has been adopted by historians and novelists alike, it occurred to me that the “t” in the printed word might be a misreading of “c.” I had the original Register, which is in the Advocates’ Library, examined by an expert, and found that my surmise was correct, and that Mariota was clearly the daughter of *Achyn*, which is the Gaelic for Hector. As some of you may be aware, in ancient Scottish writings “t” is very like “c,” the upright stem of “t” being, however, somewhat taller than that of “c.”

Second. Provost Davidson, who is invariably claimed as a Saxon, was, I think I can say, unquestionably one of the Celtic Clan Dhail’ of Badenoch, who fought the battle of Invernaven, and the famous fight on the North Inch of Perth in 1396. After that fight that clan, which at the time was, so far as I can ascertain, the only clan or sept or family in Scotland which bore the name of Mac Dhail’ or Davidson, was scattered, and my belief is that Robert Davidson followed the Earl of Mar, whom he must have known in Badenoch, into Aberdeenshire, and, as many another Celt has since done, started business in Aberdeen as the keeper of a “cellar” or tavern. In any case, Mar was a friend of his, as several entries in records show. As early as 1396 there is an

entry in the Aberdeen Burgh Register in the following terms: "In the taberna [tavern] of Robert Davidson for Alexander Stewart [Mar] and various neighbours of the town, in various potations, XXS." About the same time another payment is recorded as follows: "Item, on account of Alexander Stewart for wine before Robert Davidson's gate, iis." It is significant that in a charter to Mar, dated 1409, to which Davidson is a witness, his name is not given as Robert Davidson, but as Robertus filius David (Robert son of David)—in Gaelic Raibeart Mac Dhai', obviously his patronymic and not his surname—just as, for example, we still in Gaelic call the Duke of Argyll (Campbell) MacCailein (son of Colin); the old Lairds of Glengarry (Macdonell) Mac Alasdair (son of Alexander); the Laird of Glenmoriston (Grant) Mac Phadruig (son of Patrick); and the old proprietors of Guisachan (Fraser) Mac Uisdein (son of Hugh).

Third. The contest was not one between civilisation and barbarism. Notwithstanding what southern writers have said to the contrary, there was not at the time much difference between the civilisation or the barbarism of the east of Scotland north of the Forth and that of the territory of Donald of the Isles—for the old Celtic culture which had come from Ireland with the Celtic Church had not yet exhausted itself. So far as the opposing leaders were concerned, I have to emphasise what I said at Aberdeen. Mar, the supposed champion of civilisation, had an extremely wild career as leader of caterans and in other capa-



cities, and he won his title by besieging the widowed Countess of Mar in her Castle of Kil-drummy, and compelling her, not only to surrender that stronghold, but also to marry him. He was brought up in Badenoch, spoke Gaelic, and appears to have been a good Gaelic bard. No greater contrast to him could be found than his cousin Donald of the Isles, who not only enjoyed the status and blessing of legitimacy, but was also the most cultured Scottish chief of his day, having been educated at Oxford University, and repeatedly received and entertained at the English Court. During his whole life he was a great friend and supporter of the Church and the Church's work. It is interesting to us in Inverness to know that Mar, who in his later days did excellent service for Scotland, died in our town, and was buried in our Grey Friars' Monastery. Let me quote from the Chronicle of Fortingall (in the Black Book of Taymouth) the following notice of his death and burial;—

“Obitus Allexandri Comitiss de Mar et Garwecht anno Domini Mo ecce xxxv, et sepultus in Innernes xxvj Julii, qui fuit locumtenens domini nostri regis in tempore suo.”

(Death of Alexander, Earl of Mar and Garioch, in the year of our Lord 1435, and buried in Inverness 26th July, who was lieutenant [of the North] of our Lord the King in his time).

Fourth. The campaign was not a rebellion against the King, but an attempt to save the Earldom of Ross and the lands connected with

it in the Counties of Banff, Aberdeen, and Kincardine, which came to the Earldom as the tocher of Margaret Cumming, daughter of an Earl of Buchan, about the year 1309. Through the grasping greed of Donald's uncle, the Regent Albany, these lands were in danger of being lost, if indeed not already temporarily lost, to that Earldom. Donald recovered the Earldom, and then proceeded towards Aberdeenshire to secure its appurtenances in the east. He would no doubt have attacked the town of Aberdeen if it had resisted him, but there is not a scrap of evidence of his having threatened Aberdeen, or boasted of what he was going to do to it. Judging from what we know of Donald he was a wiser and more tactful man than to destroy his chance of success by proclaiming to the world what his intentions were. His great object was, not to sack Aberdeen, but to save the eastern estates. Certain southern writers write as if the importance and wealth of Aberdeen were enough to lure the Celts from the remotest of the Isles. As a matter of fact, that town was at the time not more important than the Inverness of the day.

Fifth. There is no ground for the statement that Donald's army was much if at all larger than the army led by Mar. One would expect the reverse to be the case, for Mar's men were gathered together in the compact, easily accessible, and thickly populated extensive district in which the battle was fought.

Sixth. Donald of the Isles cannot be said to have been defeated at Harlaw. Indeed, Major,

who wrote about one hundred years after the date of the fight, states that he finds the very opposite of that in the chroniclers, although the Lord of the Isles was "forced to retreat." The fact appears to be that, after the terrible carnage caused by his men, in which the most important personages in the Counties of Aberdeen, Kincardine, and Forfar fell, he came to the conclusion that he would be opposed by the whole of the east and south of Scotland; and he decided to quietly withdraw to the west. To that consideration was no doubt added his knowledge of the tendency of the Western Highlanders to return to their homes if they failed to carry all before them in their customary impetuous first onset. The fruits of victory were, however, gathered by Donald's family, when, in due time, the Earldom of Ross and its appurtenances in the east came to it. In spirit, if not always literally, the remark of the ancient seanachie of Clan Ranald is true—I give a translation from the Gaelic—"Donald fought the battle of Garioch against Duke Murdoch in defence of his own right and of the Earldom of Ross, and on the return of King James I. from the captivity of the King of England, Donald of Isla obtained the King's goodwill, and confirmation of Ross and the rest of his inheritance; and Duke Murdoch and his two sons were beheaded." (Book of Clan Ranald, *Reliquiae Celticae* II., 160). The execution of Murdoch and his sons at Stirling was a tragic incident in the reign of James I.

In conclusion, I must in a word refer to the deep impression which the fierceness of the

fight, and the consequent great slaughter, made on the whole of Scotland—Highland and Lowland. Ballads were composed upon the battle in Scots; and Highland bards sang of it in Gaelic. One of the Scots ballads purports to give an account by a traveller who had witnessed the battle on his way to Aberdeen. I shall only quote one verse:—

I marvlit quhat the Matter meint,
 All Folks war in a fiery fairy;
 I wist nocht quha was Fae or Freind;
 Zit quietly I did me carrie.
 But sen the Days of auld King Hairy
 Sic Slauchter was not hard nor sene;
 And thair I had nae Tyme to tairry
 For Bissiness in Aberdene.

The line "I wist nocht quha was Fae or Freind" is suggestive. If the fight was between Gaelic speakers on the one side and speakers of English or Scots on the other, the author could have no difficulty in realising which of the opposing forces were his friends. Incidentally the line goes to show that Gaelic was the language heard on both sides, for it could not have been English or Scots, which were unknown to the Celts of the West.

As the authors of "Clan Donald" remark in their excellent account of the campaign, "The courage of the men of the Islands was roused to the most patriotic fervour by the stirring appeal of MacVuirich, the Tyrtæus of the campaign, to remember the ancient valour of the race of Conn"—the Macdonalds. MacVuirich, who was Donald of the Isles' bard,

and probably marched with him to Harlaw, composed in Gaelic the most vigorous and vehement exhortation to heroic action that has perhaps appeared in any language. It is given in full in a collection of Gaelic poetry issued in 1804 by Alexander and Donald Stewart, and it was a few years ago printed in the "Northern Chronicle" from that collection. The Macdonalds were known in Gaelic as Clann Chuinn, from Conn of the Hundred Fights, and the poem opens with the lines:—

“ A Chlanna Chuinn, cuimhnichibh,
Cruas an am na h-iorghuill!”
(Sons of Conn, remember,
Hardihood in time of strife!)

And then he at great length tells them how to put the exhortation into practice. Since MacVuirich's time other bards—spread over the centuries that have since passed—among them, MacCodrum, John Macdonald (Iain Lom), Mairearad ni' Lachuinn, Iain MacAilein, Allan Macdougall, and Archibald Grant — have alluded to the battle with a confidence and an enthusiasm that leave no room for doubt that in their view, and in the view of Highlanders generally, the Macdonalds and their allies had the undoubted victory on the gory field of the Red Harlaw.



